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THE MONSTRESS STORY SO FAR...

Chaos continues to surround Maika Halfwolf and the ancient Monstrum, Zinn, that lives within her body. When a Cumaean Inquisitrix named Gull opened a rift between the Known World and the realm that houses the rest of the long-imprisoned Monstra, Maika and Zinn had to use all of their combined strength to close the rift, trapping the Monstra once more and averting certain apocalypse. However, the devastating aftereffects of the breach remain, driving some Arcanics to uncontrollable madness.

Meanwhile, Maika's young friend, Kippa, was betrayed by their fellow companion, the double-agent nekomancer Ren. Now Maika and her self-appointed protector, Corvin, are on a mission to find the kidnapped Kippa before her captors can take her to the mysterious "doctor." Unbeknownst to them, Kippa, who has begun to manifest supernatural powers, has managed to slip away from her kidnappers – but her escape has led her to the Tomb of Baru, a cursed cave from which no one has ever returned.

Through it all, the Known World is moving ever closer to open warfare between humans and Arcanics. In preparation, rival factions are beginning to enter uneasy alliances – including the Arcanic Dusk and Dawn Courts and their betrothed representatives, the Baroness and the Warlord.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

REN An enigmatic nekomancer cat with mysterious motives, he is one of Maika's companions on her journey, and perhaps an agent of the Dusk Court — or some greater power.

SIR CORVIN D'ORO An Arcanic Lord, First Watchman of the Court and Commander of the Inner Wall. He is loyal to the Dusk Court but has willingly defied their orders because of his desire to protect Maika and his belief that she can and will serve a greater purpose.

WARLORD The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans -- but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

WHEN TWO PEOPLE ARE ONE IN THEIR INNERMOST HEARTS, THEY SHATTER EVEN THE STRENGTH OF IRON.
WHEN TWO PEOPLE ALLY WITH EACH OTHER IN THEIR INNERMOST HEARTS, THEIR VOWS ARE STRONGER THAN POEMS.

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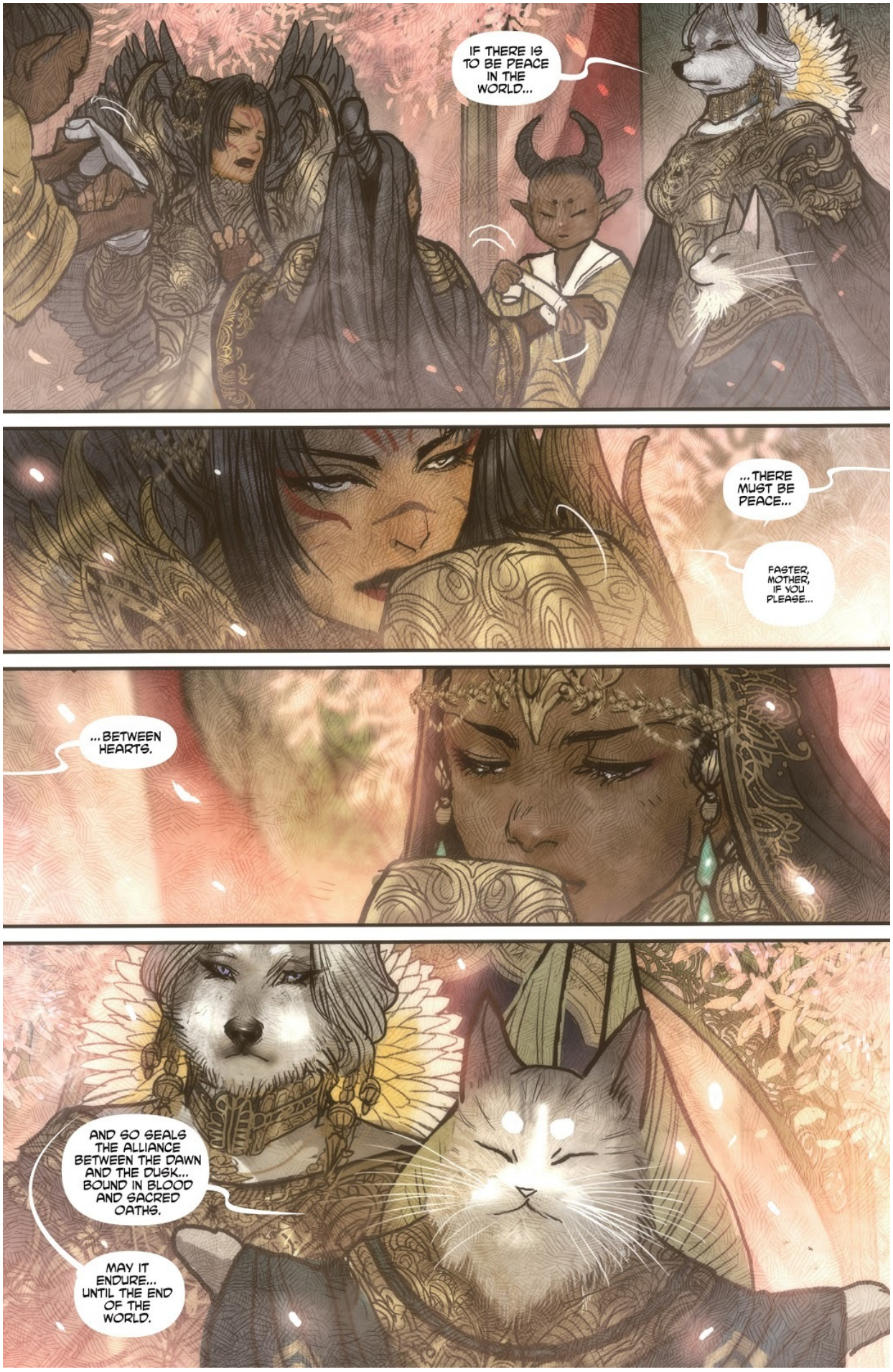
IF THERE IS TO BE PEACE IN THE WORLD...
...THERE MUST BE PEACE...
FASTER, MOTHER, IF YOU PLEASE...
...BETWEEN HEARTS.
AND SO SEALS THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE DAWN AND THE DUSK... BOUND IN BLOOD AND SACRED OATHS.
MAY IT ENDURE... UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.

MMMPH!
I MAY NOT WANT THIS MARRIAGE, BUT I BEND THE KNEE TO IT...
...AND TO YOU, MY LADY.
WE ARE WIVES NOW. OUR FATES ARE MEASURED IN THE SAME BREATH.
I WILL NOT FAIL YOU.
AND NO MATTER YOUR TRUE PURPOSE IN WANTING THIS MARRIAGE...
YOU WILL NOT FAIL *ME.*

OH, HOW TERRIBLE. ALL THESE DEAD PEOPLE...
A BREEZE?
BUT THAT MEANS... THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY OUT...
FOX GIRL!
COME BACK HERE!
GASP

MMMPH!
I SMELL WATER...
...AND THE AIR IS FRESH...
...EXCEPT FOR THAT SMELL...
AIIEEE!!

LET... HER... GO!
THIS FOX IS MINE!
RRAAA!
RRAAA!
NOT... YOURS...
NNNGGHH...
CHHNNG

NO NO NO NO NO!
PICKS AND AXES! JUST DIE!
ALREADY... DEAD!
BE... STILL...
BE... SILENT...

...NNNGH... WHERE... WHAT...
:GASP:
GOOD, YOU'RE AWAKE.
COME HERE A MOMENT, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO TALK WITH YOU. KIPPA --
THE HALFWOLF HAS GONE AFTER THE CHILD. NEITHER OF THEM NEED YOU.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I HAVE TO WARN MAIKA --
A LITTLE LATE FOR WARNINGS...
...TRAITOR.
NO.
YOU DARE DENY IT?
I CANNOT DIVINE YOUR REASONS, NEKOMANCER, BUT I DO KNOW YOU BETRAYED THE MANDATE OF YOUR GODDESS.
AND THE HEART OF A CHILD.
FWAKK
DOES... DOES THE HALFWOLF KNOW?
YOU'LL HAVE TO ASK HER YOURSELF. IF YOU HAVE THE COURAGE.
NOW BE QUIET. YOU STILL MIGHT BE USEFUL TO ME.
AH, YES. YOUR MEMORY HAS BEEN TAMPERED WITH.
PERHAPS ON THE ISLE OF BONES AFTER YOU ENCOUNTERED THE BLOOD FOX. I KNOW YOU WERE THERE WITH THE HALFWOLF.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THE BLOOD FOX HAS BEEN DEAD TWO THOUSAND --

##GURK##
N-N-NO... S-STOP...
...P-P-PLEASE... IT'S T-T-TOO M-M-MUCH...
OH, UBASTI... HOW COULD I HAVE FORGOTTEN THE ISLE... THE MADNESS OF THAT PLACE...
WHY WOULD YOU RELEASE THOSE MEMORIES?
YOU CAN'T TRUST ME WITH THEM...
I NEED THEM. I NEED EVERYTHING THE BLOOD FOX SAID TO THE HALFWOLF...
...AND WHAT THE BLOOD FOX DISCOVERED ABOUT THE BODIES OF OLD GODS...
HE DISCOVERED NOTHING.
DON'T LIE.
DAYS AGO THE HALFWOLF KNEW THE BONES OF AN OLD GOD WOULD CUT ANOTHER OLD GOD. EVEN I DID NOT KNOW THAT.
PERHAPS THE MONSTER TOLD HER.
PERHAPS. BUT THE BLOOD FOX WAS EXILED TO THE CORPSE OF A DEAD GOD FOR TWO THOUSAND YEARS.
HE WAS TOO BRILLIANT NOT TO HAVE LEARNED SOMETHING USEFUL IN ALL THAT TIME.
AND FAR MORE LIKELY TO BOAST OF SUCH THINGS TO THE HALFWOLF.
CHNNK
LET'S SAY YOU'RE RIGHT.
THE BLOOD FOX WENT MAD BECAUSE OF THAT CURSED PLACE.
AND YOU? THE REST OF YOUR KIND? HOW WOULD THE ANCIENTS USE THAT KNOWLEDGE?
YOUR DISGUISE NEVER ONCE FOOLED ME, MY LADY.
I KNOW FULLY WHAT YOU ARE... IF NOT WHO.

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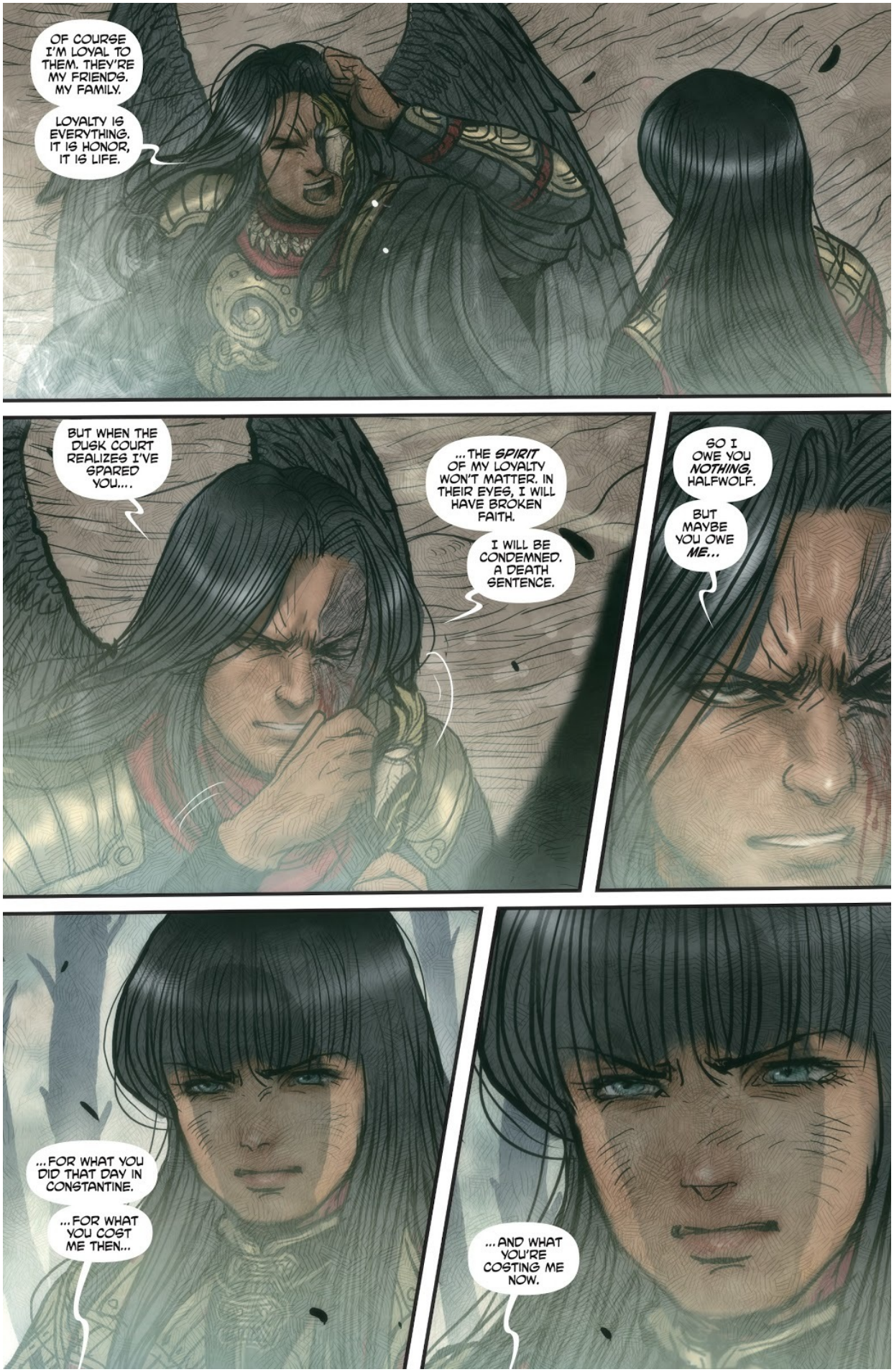
ALAS, I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO HIDE MY TRUE FORM FROM EVERYONE.
BUT I THANK YOU FOR YOUR DISCRETION.
IT'S NOT UP TO ME TO DECIDE WHEN AND HOW AN ANCIENT REVEALS HERSELF.
ESPECIALLY YOU.
A WISE CAT IS A QUIET CAT... IS THAT NOT WHAT YOUR POETS SAY?
BUT FOR NOW, I NEED YOU TO TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW.
AND THEN, PERHAPS, YOU MAY VENTURE INTO THIS NEW MAD WORLD TO REDEEM YOURSELF...

THE ONI AND CAT PASSED THROUGH HERE, HOURS AGO.
BOTH TERRIFIED.
I CAN NO LONGER SENSE KIPPA, THOUGH. THEY COULD HAVE BEGUN CARRYING HER AGAIN.
KIPPA MIGHT BE DEAD. THAT COULD EXPLAIN WHY THEY'RE SO AFRAID.
BECAUSE THEY FAILED.
SHE COULD HAVE ESCAPED.
MAYBE. SHE'S... TOUGH.

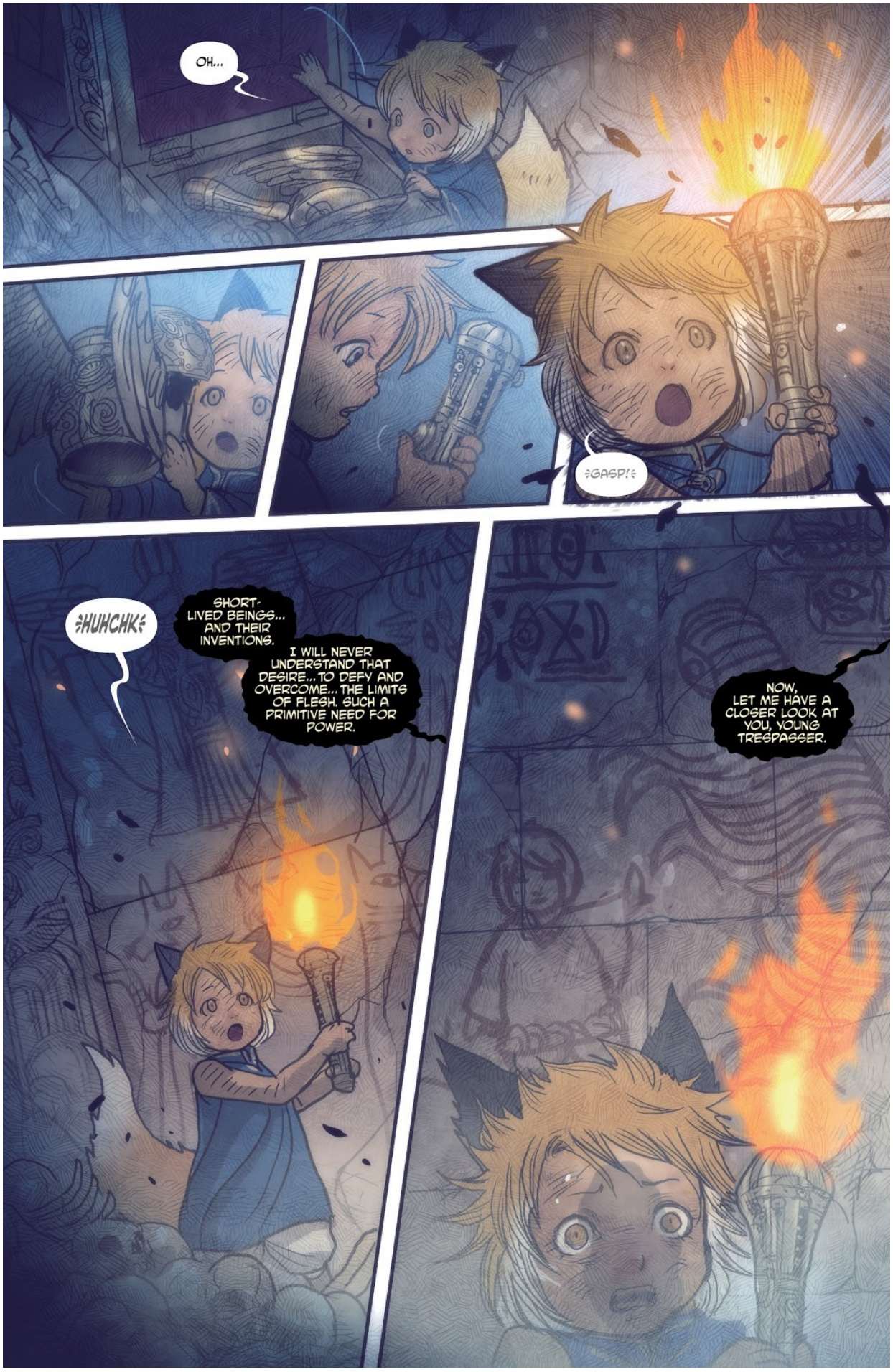
WHY DO YOU WEAR THE MASK, CORVIN?
EVERYONE HAS WAR WOUNDS. YOU'RE NOT SPECIAL.
PERHAPS I'M VAIN.
AND YOU? DOES THAT HURT? OR ARE YOU TRYING TO SUMMON THE GOD?
YOUR KNUCKLES ARE WHITE.
YOU WERE RIGHT.
EIGHT OF US STAGGERED OUT OF CONSTANTINE. MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE.
WHO WAS THE SNITCH?

SO YOU CAN KILL THEM?
NEVER.
I JUST... NEED TO KNOW.
WE CALL HER THE BARONESS.
THE SAME BARONESS WHO TRIED TO KIDNAP ME ALL THOSE MONTHS AGO?
YOU'RE SAYING I KNOW *HER?*
I WANT A REAL NAME.
NO.
NNGH!
STILL LOYAL TO THE DUSK COURT, *HUH?*


OF COURSE I'M LOYAL TO THEM. THEY'RE MY FRIENDS. MY FAMILY.
LOYALTY IS EVERYTHING. IT IS HONOR, IT IS LIFE.
BUT WHEN THE DUSK COURT REALIZES I'VE SPARED YOU....
...THE SPIRIT OF MY LOYALTY WON'T MATTER. IN THEIR EYES, I WILL HAVE BROKEN FAITH.
I WILL BE CONDEMNED. A DEATH SENTENCE.
SO I OWE YOU NOTHING, HALFWOLF.
BUT MAYBE YOU OWE ME...
...FOR WHAT YOU DID THAT DAY IN CONSTANTINE.
...FOR WHAT YOU COST ME THEN...
...AND WHAT YOU'RE COSTING ME NOW.

I AM DEFYING EVERYONE I CARE ABOUT -- BREAKING MY HONOR WITH THEM -- BECAUSE I BELIEVE YOUR POWER MIGHT BE A GREATER GOOD FOR US ALL.
AND I'M HERE HELPING YOU FIND A CHILD THAT ISN'T MINE BECAUSE SHE MEANS SOMETHING TO YOU...
...AND I SUSPECT THERE ARE FEW WHO COULD CLAIM THAT DUBIOUS PRIVILEGE.
YOU'LL REGRET IT, CORVIN. ALL OF IT.
THIS POWER... AND ME... AREN'T GOOD FOR ANYTHING BUT DESTRUCTION.
BUT WILL YOU DESTROY FOR OUR SAKES, LADY HALFWOLF?
OR DO YOU HAVE NO PURPOSE AT ALL?

...MASTER REN...
...MISS...
=GASP=
=KOFF= =KOFF= =KOFF=
=SIGHHH=
THANK YOU, GODDESS, FOR NOT MAKING ME DEAD.
HMMM...


OH...
:GASP!:
:HUHCHK:
SHORT-LIVED BEINGS... AND THEIR INVENTIONS.
I WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND THAT DESIRE... TO DEFY AND OVERCOME... THE LIMITS OF FLESH. SUCH A PRIMITIVE NEED FOR POWER.
NOW, LET ME HAVE A CLOSER LOOK AT YOU, YOUNG TRESPASSER.

WELL, FUCK. WHAT NOW?
THOSE ARE SOLDIERS, NOT VILLAGERS. I DON'T RECOGNIZE THEIR UNIFORMS.
NEITHER DO I.
MAIKA HALFWOLF...
...WE ALWAYS MEET UNDER SUCH TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES...

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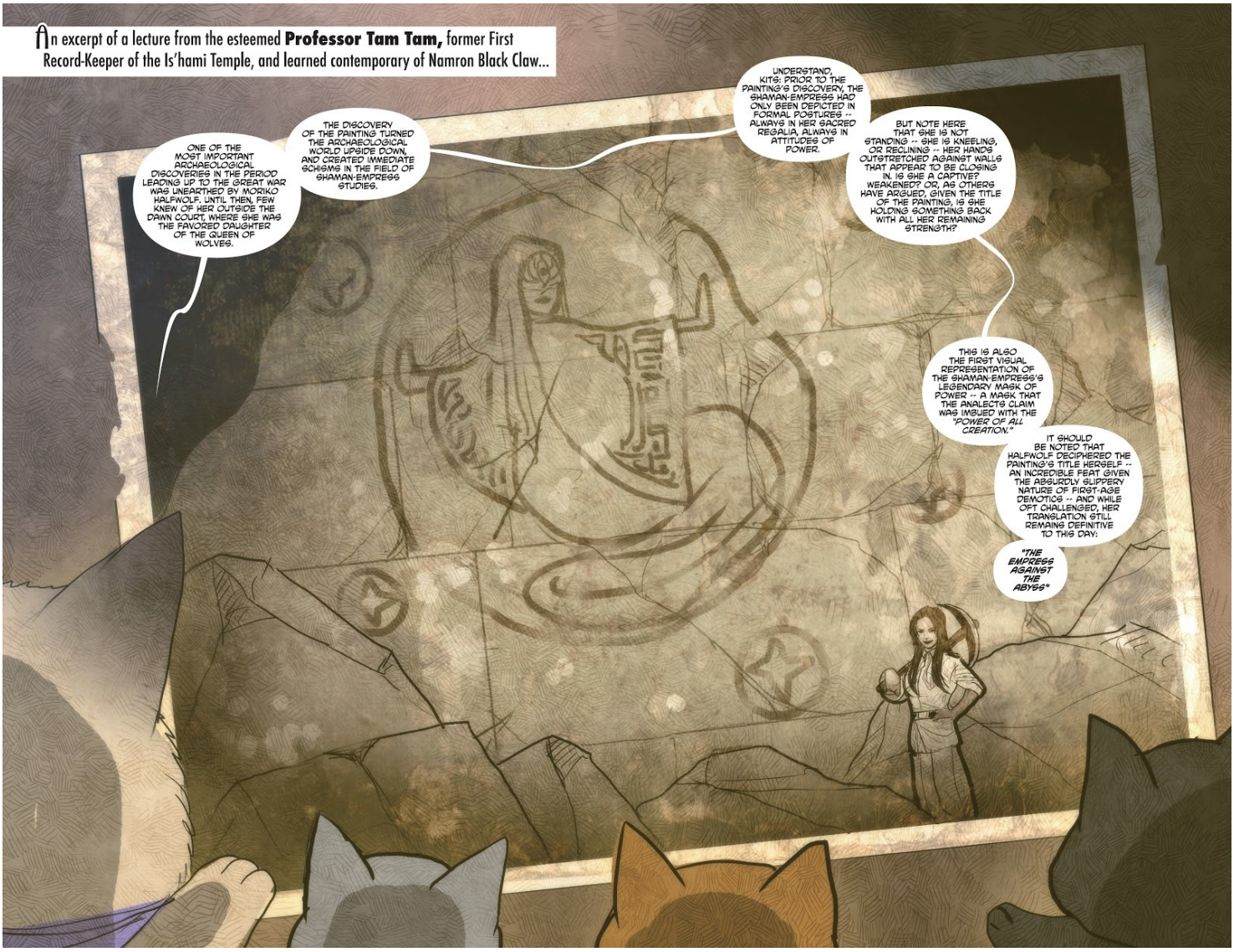
WE KNOW EACH OTHER?
MY DEAR, WE'RE PRACTICALLY *FAMILY.*
IT CAN'T BE--
THE BLESSED ARE NOT EASILY TOUCHED BY DEATH, MAIKA.
YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT BETTER THAN MOST.

YVETTE LO LIM.
I SHOULD KILL YOU.
YET AGAIN?
YOU MIGHT GROW TIRED OF TRYING, MAIKA.
LET'S FIND OUT.
BLOOD GIVE US LIFE.
BLOOD GIVE US LIGHT.
BLOOD GIVE US LIFE.
BLOOD GIVE US LIGHT.
BLOOD GIVE US LIFE.
BLOOD GIVE US LIGHT.
THE BLOOD IS POWER.
BLOOD GIVE US LIFE.
BLOOD GIVE US LIGHT.

YOUR MOTHER FOOLED US ALL.
MAIKA, COME TO ME. I SENSE...
THE MASK WAS ONLY A TOOL, NOT THE KEY.
IT WAS YOU, ALL ALONG. HIDING RIGHT BENEATH OUR NOSES.
AND NOW I'VE FOUND YOU...

... MY BELOVED DAUGHTER.

NNGH!
MAIKA!
TO BE CONTINUED...


An excerpt of a lecture from the esteemed **Professor Tam Tam,** former First Record-Keeper of the Is'hami Temple, and learned contemporary of Namron Black Claw...
ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN THE PERIOD LEADING UP TO THE GREAT WAR WAS UNEARTHED BY MORIKO HALFWOLF. UNTIL THEN, FEW KNEW OF HER OUTSIDE THE DAWN COURT, WHERE SHE WAS THE FAVORED DAUGHTER OF THE QUEEN OF WOLVES.
THE DISCOVERY OF THE PAINTING TURNED THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORLD UPSIDE DOWN, AND CREATED IMMEDIATE SCHISMS IN THE FIELD OF SHAMAN-EMPRESS STUDIES.
UNDERSTAND, KITS: PRIOR TO THE PAINTING'S DISCOVERY, THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS HAD ONLY BEEN DEPICTED IN FORMAL POSTURES -- ALWAYS IN HER SACRED REGALIA, ALWAYS IN ATTITUDES OF POWER.
BUT NOTE HERE THAT SHE IS NOT STANDING -- SHE IS KNEELING, OR RECLINING -- HER HANDS OUTSTRETCHED AGAINST WALLS THAT APPEAR TO BE CLOSING IN. IS SHE A CAPTIVE? WEAKENED? OR, AS OTHERS HAVE ARGUED, GIVEN THE TITLE OF THE PAINTING, IS SHE HOLDING SOMETHING BACK WITH ALL HER REMAINING STRENGTH?
THIS IS ALSO THE FIRST VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS'S LEGENDARY MASK OF POWER -- A MASK THAT THE ANALECTS CLAIM WAS IMBUED WITH THE *"POWER OF ALL CREATION."*
IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT HALFWOLF DECIPHERED THE PAINTING'S TITLE HERSELF -- AN INCREDIBLE FEAT GIVEN THE ABSURDLY SLIPPERY NATURE OF FIRST-AGE DEMOTICS -- AND WHILE OFT CHALLENGED, HER TRANSLATION STILL REMAINS DEFINITIVE TO THIS DAY:
"THE EMPRESS AGAINST THE ABYSS"

SANA'S CHARACTER SKETCHES

YVETTE

Send letters & fan art to:
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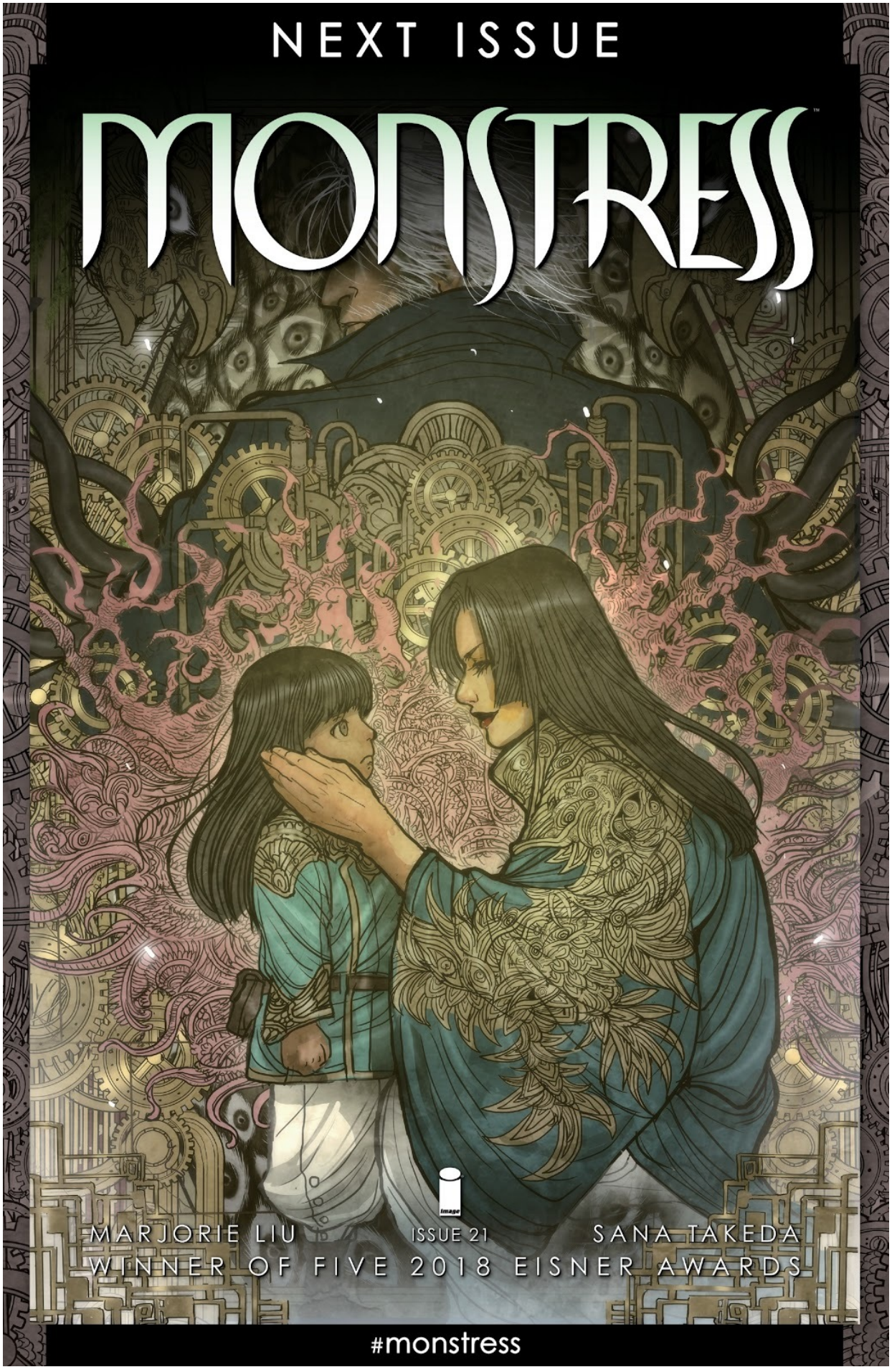
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